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Chairman: Mr. Galuška ..... (Czech Republic)

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The meeting was called to order at 3.05 p.m.

Agenda item 106: Social development, including questions relating to the world social situation and to youth, ageing, disabled persons and the family (*continued*) (A/54/3, A/54/56, A/54/57, A/54/59, A/54/61 and Corr.1, A/54/62, A/54/66-E/1999/6, A/54/98, A/54/128-E/1999/70, A/54/256, A/54/268, A/54/388 and A/C.3/54/L.2)

1. **Mr. Akinsanya** (Nigeria) said that the fifty-fourth session of the General Assembly had devoted a two-day plenary meeting to the International Year of Older Persons, in recognition of the important role that older persons played in shaping world events. His delegation associated itself with the statement made by Guyana on behalf of the Group of 77 and China. It also supported the objectives of the International Year and the statement made by the Secretary-General while launching the International Year of Older Persons on 1 October 1998 to the effect that a society for all ages was one that did not caricature older persons as patients and pensioners. Instead, it saw them as both agents and beneficiaries of development and honoured traditional elders in their leadership and consultative roles in communities throughout the world.

2. Within the context of the launching of the International Year of Older Persons, his country's Ministry of Women's Affairs and Social Development had organized, in collaboration with non-governmental organizations, a special seminar on the role of the aged in national development.

3. Owing to its multi-ethnic culture and traditions, Nigeria had considerable respect for older persons and was therefore concerned about their increasing neglect, especially in developing countries, where deteriorating economic conditions adversely affected their situation and welfare. His country, like other African countries, believed that care for the elderly should be family based. That was consistent with the time honoured cultural traditions of Nigeria, which saw the elderly as repositories of wisdom and values, which were best imparted to the younger generation within the family setting. Within the family environment, the elderly could take advantage of the warmth and filial love of the immediate as well as extended family members. That approach had been recommended by the International Plan of Action on Ageing adopted by the World Assembly on Ageing held in Vienna in 1982.

4. Another important measure aimed at encouraging care for the elderly within the family setting was the granting of tax rebates to those who took care of their parents. In the last few years, his Government had taken concrete measures to further alleviate the plight of the weaker segments of society, including the elderly. The measures taken included the family support programme and the family economic advancement programme designed to improve the living conditions and well being of people at the grass roots, especially in the rural areas. Moreover, his Government had undertaken a review of pensions along with upward salary reviews in the public sector as a way of insulating pensioners from the ravages of inflation. Efforts were under way to expand the coverage of the Nigerian national social insurance trust fund to include pensioners outside the public sector.

5. The umbilical link between childhood, youth and old age also needed to be underscored. It was often said that the child of today would grow up to become the elderly person of tomorrow. It was therefore important to look at issues pertaining to childhood, youth and older persons in a holistic manner if a society for all ages was to be achieved. For those reasons, his Government had recently restructured the former Ministry of Youth and Sports into a new Ministry of Women's Affairs and Youth Development in order to achieve better coordination, efficiency and integration of all programmes in those spheres.

6. Nigeria fully supported the decisions adopted at the World Conference of Ministers Responsible for Youth held in Lisbon in August 1998. With renewed determination, the international community would be able to overcome the problems that had persistently afflicted the institution of the family. Those problems included the impact of the HIV/AIDS pandemic, which was particularly acute in Africa. In many cases, the younger generation was the worst afflicted by that scourge, which rendered the more vulnerable segments of society, namely the elderly, helpless by saddling them with the task of taking care of those who should normally take care of them.

7. The majority of older persons worldwide were women. Therefore, Member States should fully take into account their concerns, given the peculiar problems they faced in terms of limited opportunities for social, economic and political empowerment, unlike men. It was therefore important that national activities commemorating the remaining part of the International Year of Older Persons should reflect those factors.

8. Despite so many difficulties, through common effort, determination and political will, the quality of life of families, including the youth and the elderly, could be enhanced. The international community should take on the collective responsibility of ushering in the twenty-first

century with the vision of creating a better and genuine society for all ages.

9. **Ms. Fonseca** (Venezuela) said that her delegation associated itself with the statements made by Guyana on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, and by Mexico, on behalf of the Rio Group. A gender perspective should be incorporated into the implementation of programmes of action designed to address the problems of the most vulnerable groups of society, bearing in mind their specific needs. Moreover, account should be taken of the impact of the political, economic, cultural and environmental changes that had occurred in recent decades, including the phenomenon of globalization, on those groups.

10. The main thrust of Venezuela's policy was social development. Participatory democracy was the focal point of development and for achieving the goals set. Her Government had established a single social welfare fund to make only one entity responsible for the mobilization and administration of resources in order to optimize policies and plans, regulate welfare programmes for strengthening comprehensive health care and education, promote a grass-roots and competitive economy, promote and develop microenterprises and cooperatives as a form of grass-roots involvement in economic activity and in job training for young people and adults.

11. The Venezuelan National Council for the Integration of Disabled Persons was responsible for harmonizing policy in that area, and, in June 1998, had held its first summit meeting with a view to coordinating measures and policies for the integration of disabled persons into development. Her Government welcomed the exchange of experiences, supported all international initiatives aimed at strengthening institutions and policies for the benefit of disabled persons, and commended the elaboration of the Inter-American Convention for the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination for Reasons of Disability.

12. Aware of the attention needed by young people, the Venezuelan Government had provided training courses in various areas so that they could develop productive and useful activities, and had set up a local social network offering protection for children and adolescents at high social risk. It had also consolidated the national youth prevention and social and job integration system, through job training, the dissemination and promotion of job opportunities, the integration of young people into the labour market, prevention and social integration programmes, a campaign against drugs, and the strengthening and expansion of networks to promote the interests of young people.

13. Her Government placed high priority on education and intended to provide free education so that the whole population could have access thereto. As a result of that commitment, 600,000 children had enrolled in the new school year beginning in September 1999. Pre-school education was a fundamental phase in the development of cognitive ability. During the current school year, therefore, the Ministry of Education hoped to enrol 300,000 neglected children in educational programmes and in addition to strengthen assistance to day-care centres and group homes.

14. With regard to the needs and potential of older persons, she said that the National Geriatric and Gerontological Institute administered shelters for older persons, homes where older persons could live and work in agriculture, care units for older persons, a gerontology training programme, a nutritional care programme and a cultural and employment reactivation centre, the objective of which was to reintegrate those over 50 years of age into the labour market.

15. It was essential to redefine the role and significance of the family for the new century and social and development programmes should seek to defend the family unit against the disintegration currently occurring. When participating in the observance of the International Day of Families, the First Lady of Venezuela had emphasized the need to re-establish the family as the pillar of the whole society, to protect its role as the guardian of the people's cultural traditions and effective values, and to strengthen its formative, educational and productive capacities. The tenth anniversary of the International Year of the Family should serve as a propitious opportunity to strengthen international commitment and complementary measures, especially at the national and local levels.

16. **Ms. Afifi** (Morocco) said that the concept of social development had emerged in the 1960s, at a time when post-decolonization development activities had become a primary concern of the international community. Human beings had, however, been overlooked since the financial institutions and other funding sources had not made them central to their development strategies. Social development questions, including the social situation throughout the world, young people, older persons, disabled persons and the family, were nevertheless still matters of continuing concern and were of great importance to all countries and to the international community. Accordingly, development must be seen in its many macroeconomic dimensions so that human needs and expectations could meet with a more rapid and effective response. A review of the first half of the implementation phase of the Programme of Action of the World Summit for Social Development had revealed a large number of limitations at all levels. Social problems continued to

multiply, and the negative aspects of globalization, the detrimental impact of the international financial crisis on a large part of the world, especially Asia and Latin America, the deterioration of the environment, the violence of structural adjustment measures, the rise in indebtedness, and the proliferation of armed conflicts continued to contribute to a worsening of the socio-economic situation of the developing countries, whose annual demographic growth represented nearly 96 per cent of the global rate. On the other hand, official development assistance, which was the mainstay of the international community's solidarity with the poor, had declined by 40 per cent since 1992 and in 1998 represented barely 0.23 per cent of the GNP of the developed countries, while the international target had been set at 0.7 per cent. All those factors had helped to create vast inequities between rich and poor countries.

17. Africa, a region in constant crisis, was the continent most affected by conflicts, instability, poverty, AIDS and other social and political scourges that had hampered its social development. Of the 33 million persons infected by HIV/AIDS in the world, 22 million resided in Africa south of the Sahara. Furthermore, 44 per cent of Africans and 51 per cent of the inhabitants of Africa south of the Sahara lived in utter poverty. In the face of such obstacles, it was impossible fully to achieve the goals of the World Summit and rectify the deterioration of the social situation of developing countries. However, with the recognition by the rich countries and the international financial institutions of the importance of the social dimension of development, an important step had been taken and priority had been given to social policies at all levels with a view to promoting progress and social justice.

18. The social situation in Morocco was no exception, but with firm political will and by mobilizing all sectors of society, the Government had managed to launch a social policy designed to respond more effectively to human needs, especially by strengthening positive interaction between economic and social policies. In that spirit, the Government had formulated social development and poverty elimination strategies, the goal of which was to increase the access of the poor to basic social services and to combat unemployment, inequities and social exclusion by offering job opportunities, generating income, assisting the most vulnerable sectors and reforming social protection systems. Among the measures adopted, mention should be made of the creation of a social development agency the role of which was to support activities designed to reduce poverty, to reform the basic foodstuffs subsidies programme and to restructure the national assistance institution to provide better care in rural and peri-urban areas.

19. Morocco had undertaken numerous reforms in order to create a favourable environment for the social integration of all vulnerable groups. The State had spared no effort to integrate the needs of the disabled into sectoral policies and programmes and it had recently created a Ministry responsible for that sector of the population. Furthermore, in recent years, various measures had been adopted to benefit older persons, including revision of the legal and financial situation of the pension fund and improvements to their social standing. In 1998, Morocco had hosted the first meeting of the Arab-African Union of Older Persons and, on 1 October 1999, it had celebrated the International Day of Older Persons.

20. The special session of the General Assembly review of the World Summit for Social Development should provide an opportunity for new measures to be adopted and for a more decisive commitment to be made by all those concerned in order to achieve more equitable social development.

21. **Mr. Tekle** (Eritrea) said that, over the past year, many problems had resulted in serious consequences for social development in different parts of the world. Among the most serious had been conflicts, both between and within States, and major economic crises. However, 1999 had also been a year of great hopes and opportunities because it was the International Year of Older Persons, which had had a considerable impact and triggered many national and international initiatives. His delegation believed that the social sector should be given high priority in the development process, since no economic development programme could be meaningful if it did not endeavour to eliminate hunger and illiteracy, provide adequate health services, improve the quality of life, and give due attention to human values.

22. The Government of Eritrea's economic and social policies were based on the conviction that, to be successful, development must emphasize social development. That was underscored in the National Charter of February 1994 and the macro-policy of November 1994, which paid special attention to human resources development and to health, social welfare, and the rehabilitation of war victims and other vulnerable and disadvantaged members of society, especially women, young people and older persons. For that reason, his delegation welcomed the attention that the Committee and other international forums were paying to social issues. In addressing those issues, the people and Government of Eritrea had necessarily borne in mind their own past experience, their current situation and their hopes for the future. The war of independence had involved the entire population and, since it had lasted for 30 years, all age

groups within each family had taken part in it; it was therefore inevitable that it would spawn a society for all ages. Under those circumstances, a dialectic process had been created in which one generation educated the following generation and passed on to it values such as freedom, development based on self-reliance, and work as a means to a dignified and prosperous future.

23. Eritrea's policies and programmes were essentially in consonance with the basic concepts and strategies of the Copenhagen Summit and the various reports of the Secretary-General on social development; for example, the responsibility of children to care for their elders was a principle as sacrosanct as that of the responsibility of parents to care for their children. Both principles were enshrined in article 22, paragraph 3, of the Eritrean Constitution, which also gave an important role to the family in the development and welfare of society and the care of children and older persons. Indeed, the family continued to play the same unifying role that it had played during the war and to be a catalyst for cooperation and development, helping to mitigate many social problems, as society, the Constitution and the National Charter recognized.

24. Young people in Eritrea, who had shouldered a historic responsibility and actively participated in the liberation struggle, now assumed an equal responsibility in the country's defence and reconstruction. The National Youth and Students Association had enabled young people to participate in decision-making on major political, social, economic and cultural programmes throughout the country.

25. Older persons had made an important contribution to both the liberation struggle and the reconstruction of the country in areas such as the rebuilding of the railway system, education and health, and they had been given access to microcredit to carry out agricultural and commercial activities. At the same time, the Government had organized a modest but effective programme to care for those who could not perform any activity. The programme included the establis' ment of residential services, the reintegration of older persons into their extended families and the provision of medical services.

26. To help the disabled to become self-reliant and to reintegrate them into the workforce, the Government of Eritrea had established a community-based rehabilitation programme that opened direct channels to the community by training local facilitators and creating rehabilitation committees in the villages. The programme, in which the communities were already participating actively, would be given further impetus when the draft law on the disabled entered into effect; that laws would allow the Government to create new financial mechanisms to generate income and assist the disabled to establish associations that would allow them to take a more active leadership in advocacy, whether or not they were war veterans.

27. His delegation joined the other delegations that had recognized the devastating effect of conflicts on development and urged the United Nations and the international community to do whatever was necessary to put an end to such conflicts. To that end, it urged the United Nations and the international community to take appropriate measures with regard to those countries which used delaying tactics in an attempt to derail the peace plans that were in place as a result of the efforts of the United Nations and the relevant international organizations.

28. **Mr. Krassowski** (Deputy Director of the Division for Social Policy and Development) noted with interest the proposals and opinions that had been put forward, and also the initiatives of the various countries, the analysis of national and international trends, and the problems encountered by each State. He added that he would ask the Secretariat to programme as many activities and resources as possible to help Member States to implement the resolutions adopted by the General Assembly. Compared to previous years, the discussion, in addition to having been highly productive, had been enriched by the increased participation of youth representatives, including young people from developing countries. As a representative had once said, the work of the Committee was the hardest of all, because it did not consist in merely discussing practical issues, reconciling interests or solving technical problems, but rather in something as basic as deciding what exactly was a society for all and achieving consensus among the different viewpoints of States on a single definition, based on a common concept of humanity.

The meeting rose at 3.50 p.m.